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BOOKS

James Bonds of Yesteryear

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In 1941 a British naval intelligence officer named Ian Fleming recommended to Gen. William (Wild Bill) Donovan that he recruit as American intelligence officers men of "absolute discretion, sobriety, devotion to duty, languages, and wide experience." Donovan, a World War I hero and successful Wall Street lawyer, understood the fantasies of writers and presidents, and in a memo to President Roosevelt promised an international secret service staffed by young officers who were "calculatingly reckless," with "disciplined daring" and trained for "aggressive action."

The Office of Strategic Services came to include such James Bonds as John Birch, Norman O. Brown, David K. E. Bruce, Dr. Ralph J. Bunche, William Bundy, Michael Burke, Julia Child, Clark Clifford, John Kenneth Galbraith, John W. Gardner and Arthur J. Goldberg. There were others — Sterling Hayden, August Heckscher, Roger O. Hilsman, Philip Horton, H. Stuart Hughes, Clark M. MacGregor, Herbert Marcuse, Henry Ringling North. And still others: John Oakes, Walt W. Rostow, Elmo Roper, Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., Ralph de Toledano — to name just a few of the hundreds in this book by R. Harris Smith.

SMITH, WHO WAS in the trade himself, resigning in 1968 after a "very brief, uneventful, and undistinguished association with the most misunderstood bureaucracy of the American government," the Central Intelligence Agency, now lectures in political science at the University of California's Extension Division. "This history of America's first central intelligence agency" is "secret" because Smith was denied access to OSS archives, and so had to rely on the existing literature supplemented by some 200 written and verbal recollections of OSS alumni.

The book is densely packed with the bewildering variety of OSS exploits in World War II: Spying, sabotage, propaganda, military training missions, politicking and coordinating resistance groups against the Germans.

OSS agents had to compete as much with their allies as with their enemies.

OSS: The Secret History of America's First Central Intelligence Agency. By R. Harris Smith. Univ. of California Press. 458 pages. Illustrated. \$10.95.

In France and Switzerland, where Allen Dulles operated, the British SOE (Special Operations Executive) was especially grudging. In Germany itself, the OSS lost out to more orthodox American military intelligence, though paradoxically they were strongly represented at Nuremberg, where Gen. Donovan was himself a deputy prosecutor — at the same time that the head of the Nazi secret service, Gen. Reinhard Gehlen, was under OSS protection in exchange for his intelligence network in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.

From present perspective the most (literally) intriguing story is that of the OSS in China and Indochina. There were

both pro-Communists and anti-Communists in the OSS, and most agents sympathized with Asian nationalists, so that the OSS aided Thai partisans against the British and, of course, more famously, the Vietminh against the French in Laos and Vietnam (an OSS medic saved Ho Chi Minh's life). Smith's retelling of the tragicomedy of Indochina after the Japanese surrender in 1945, with Vichy and Gaullist French, British, Chinese and the Vietminh jockeying for control, makes a fascinating setpiece.

The book ends with an account of the transformation of the OSS into its "mirror image," the CIA. Smith's admiration for the OSS's wartime pragmatism, its "tradition of dissent" and its anticolonialism suggests his thesis: That the OSS/CIA has been made the straw man of the radical and liberal left. In fact, he asserts, the CIA has been the principal guardian of liberal values in the "intelligence community."

HE REMINDS US that the CIA fought Sen. Joseph R. McCarthy, and he argues that the CIA's campaign to fund anti-Communist liberals successfully undermined international Communist organizations and disarmed the paranoid anti-Communism of the FBI and others at home. He notes that CIA liberals worked against Batista for Castro, who betrayed them, allowing the CIA conservatives to plan the Bay of Pigs action. Finally, he points to the evidence in the Pentagon Papers that the CIA has been a critic of the Vietnam War from the beginning.

But the question remains whether the OSS "tradition of dissent" is meaningful, whether it doesn't compromise liberals as much as aid them. Smith's book is full of cryptic references to former OSS agents now prominent in international business and finance. CIA liberalism has not prevented a number of CIA-fomented coups d'etat in favor of military regimes. Even CIA liberal criticism of the war in Vietnam seems to have had little effect on policy. All might be fair in time of war, but Smith ought to have scouted the need for a permanent bureaucracy part of whose function is officially devoted to clandestine political manipulations abroad in time of "peace."



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